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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TRIPOLI 000506

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STATE FOR NEA/MAG, PRM, DRL

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [LY](#)
SUBJECT: LIBYA WORKS TO FIND BALANCE ON LABOR AND MIGRATION ISSUES

REF: A) 05 TRIPOLI 332 B) TRIPOLI 373

CLASSIFIED BY: Gregory L. Berry, Chief of Mission, Executive ,
Department of State.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. The GOL is beginning to work with international partners such as UNHCR and IOM on facing their migration challenges, but there is still ample room for strengthening cooperation. A staggering 750,000 to one million migrant workers currently live within Libya's borders in addition to its local population of 5.5 million. Migrant workers from Africa and Egypt contribute to the economy and fill jobs that traditionally Libyans have not been willing to perform, especially menial and semi-skilled labor. Libya is trying to maintain a balance in stemming the tide of illegal migration from Africa, while still maintain its leading role in the continent. An upcoming UN conference on migration might be a platform to engage with the international community on combating illegal migration. While trying to secure its land borders, it also must grapple with the growing issue of foreign nationals using its coastline as a launching point for the dangerous boat journey to Europe. The Secretary of Labor, while recognizing the need for foreign labor

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sources, is under pressure to bring down the high unemployment rate for the country's young population. Clearly, the GOL is willing to work with international partners to a certain degree on its migrant worker challenges, but there is no clear timetable for doing so. END SUMMARY.

MIGRATION BY THE NUMBERS

[1](#)2. (SBU) International organizations estimate there are 750,000 to one million migrants within Libyan borders, working mainly in the construction, oil, hotel and restaurant industries. In a country with a local population of only 5.5 million, their presence is highly apparent. Of these migrant workers, UNHCR believes that approximately 5% fall within their mandate,

especially those from the Horn of Africa region. While migrants from most Arab countries can enter without a visa and stay for a period of up to six months, Africans have a difficult time obtaining visitor visas and many enter illegally through the almost 4500 km of desert land borders that Libya shares with its neighbors. Migrant workers without the proper documentation are subject to frequent deportations. According to a GOL contact at the General Peoples Committee for Foreign Liaison and International Cooperation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs equivalent), 50,000 illegal migrants were identified by the local law enforcement during just one month this summer, many of whom were sent to local detention centers and deported.

LOCAL UNHCR AND IOM OFFICES SAY COOPERATION STALLED, BUT
POTENTIAL EXISTS

13. (C) The Chief of Mission at UNHCR in Tripoli, Mohamed Hantosh Alwash characterized his office's relationship with the GOL as "stalled", primarily on the issue of finalizing an official MOU with the government (ref A). In addition, the GOL still does not officially recognize the existence of refugees within their borders. "Migrant workers are seen as African brothers or Arab brothers, never people in need of help" says Alwash. Still, there are some encouraging signs of cooperation. Last month, the World Islamic Call Society, an adjunct organization funded by GOL to promote moderate Islamic thought, hosted World Refugee Day in conjunction with UNHCR. Alwash calls this a "step in the right direction" and hopes to follow up with a migration and asylum conference this November or December, with the blessing of the GOL. UNHCR is given informal access to Libyan detention centers to screen for refugees, and in some instances, migrants identified as refugees are given over to UNHCR custody. Alwash also is pleased with the recent formation a committee at the General People's Committee for Justice to draft a law on asylum.

14. (C) Laurence Hart, Chief of Mission at the International Organization For Migration, granted full status in August, 2005, listed the organization's priorities in Libya as "capacity building, assistance to migrants, research and border management." IOM hopes in the near future to conduct field research to get a better sense for migration patterns and numbers. Clearly, the GOL has to work with them to achieve this goal, but they too have seen positive developments recently, especially in the creation of an inter-ministerial committee on migration. Hart says that this committee may be able to give some consistency to immigration laws, which he characterizes as "vague and without clear implementation."

AFRICAN MIGRANTS IN LIBYA: A BIT LESS THAN WELCOME

15. (C) When strolling through crowded Abu Saleem market, located in Tripoli's suburbs, one steps out of the Middle East enters the heart of an African city--and a diverse one at that. Ethiopian run hair salons sit adjacent to Camerooni, Malian, and Sudanese restaurants in this basic market. The African community here is poor, but well established. Ten years ago, as part of an overall strategy to achieve of pan-African unity, Leader Moammar Qadhafi implemented an 'open door policy' for Africans interested in seeking jobs in Libya. More African migrants came than expected, however, and now most are required to obtain visitor visas to enter the country, a difficult task. Many Africans living in Libya entered illegally across a land border. The African community is subject to suspicion from locals. African migrants are often blamed for increasing crime in metropolitan areas. Five years ago, riots broke out in the African community when a Libyan family charged an African migrant with rape and retaliated against the man. The GOL deals with the community cautiously.

16. (C) While the Leader still sees himself as the father of the continent, the government has clearly reconsidered its open door policy and is making attempts to 'regularize' illegal migrants. Because African migrants are more easily recognizable compared to Arab migrants, they are subject to more frequent deportations. The GOL fully recognizes that, even if they wanted

to, they do not have the means to deport all illegal migrants. "It is too expensive to deport all of them, to feed them and keep them in centers" said Ibrahim Dabbashi, a representative from the General People's Committee (GPC) for Foreign Liaison and International Cooperation (MFA equivalent) office of International Organizations. In addition to some sporadic deportations, the GOL's long-term strategy to stem the tide of African migrants is tied in with its pan-African ideology. According to Dabbashi, the GOL hopes to "stop the reason that people want to leave their countries by developing African nations from within" using various infrastructure and investment projects (ref B). If they receive U.S. visas in time to travel, the GOL hopes to send 25 representatives to the upcoming UN High Level Dialogue on Migration, and is looking to use the conference as a platform to engage with the international community on problem of illegal migrants. According to Dabbashi, it is difficult for the GOL to engage regionally with Africa on the issue of illegal migration because of a "conflict of interest"--Libya is a supplier of jobs that do to a certain degree help support African economies.

EGYPTIANS AND NORTH AFRICANS: ARAB BROTHERS HAVE MORE LEEWAY

7.(C) Egyptians, Tunisians, and Moroccans constitute a large percentage of migrant labor force in Libya, especially in the hotel and restaurant industries. Unlike African migrant laborers, they can enter legally without a visa and stay for up to 6 months. Many of them are able to find work within that period, but often work without an official contract. The Egyptian consul in Tripoli spends a lot of his time negotiating disputes between Libyan employers and Egyptian workers. He is frequently summoned to Rasheed Street, located near the Corinthia Hotel where the U.S. Embassy is working out of temporary space, when Libyan police arrest Egyptians who are perceived to be involved in the smuggling trade, which notoriously operates out of the low end hotels in the area. The GOL is making gestures to regularize the status of their "Arab brothers" as well. On July 18, the GPC for Manpower, Training, and Employment announced a law forbidding the hiring or employing any foreign worker without a contract between both parties. The law also called for the extradition of non-national manpower that has not been regularized. It is unclear exactly what steps are being taken to enforce this new regulation. According to the Egyptian consul, even those Egyptians who are deported for working illegally can easily reenter Libya along the 1100 km desert border that exists between the two nations, generally aided by the Awlad Ali tribe, notorious smugglers of people, weapons, and drugs.

DESTINATION: EUROPE

8.(C) While some migrants enter the country merely seeking to earn a living in Libya, others use it as base to get to far more attractive destinations in Europe. The 2000 km stretch of Libyan coastline is an ideal launching point for human smugglers, and the western cities of Zuwara and Misrauta are the most notorious points for embarkation. In July of this year, IOM statistics show that 3000 migrants landed in Lampedusa, a small island off the coast of Italy, from Libya. A majority of those landing are from Morocco, Tunisia, and Egypt, with the remainder from western and central African countries. According to the Italian Consul, Italian authorities detained 14,000 migrants from Libya since January, 2006, representing just a fraction of those who have made the journey. International and local sources say smugglers charge between 1500 to 2500 USD for the dangerous trip, and those willing to pay the price are often carried in crowded boats containing upwards of 100 passengers and an uncertain future if they make it to Europe.

9.(C) The GOL has a large stake in breaking up smuggling rings and stemming the tide of illegal migration to Europe. Besides the negative PR aspect when would be migrants perish at sea, often reported in the international press, the GOL also has to expend a lot of resources to identify, shelter, and deport migrants caught trying to get to Europe. EU member nations, especially Italy, are working with Libya by providing additional

border patrol equipment and constructing shelters for deportees.

Endemic challenges exist, however. According to UNHCR, human smugglers can easily bribe local border police. The GOL is still defining just how much cooperation it is willing to have with the EU on border patrol. This week, the Libyan Ambassador in Malta announced the GOL's rejection of the idea of a joint naval patrol with Italy and Malta because it is "against international law", saying that the government prefers financial and technical aid to Libya and assistance with a long-term solution to the eradication of poverty in Africa.

EMPLOYMENT CRUNCH

¶10. (C) For years, migrant workers have filled jobs that Libyans refused to perform. While the mentality of Libyans is changing a bit on this front, there is clearly still a need for migrant laborers to fill menial and semi-skilled jobs. At the same time, the GOL is struggling to balance its need for migrant workers with a mandate from Secretary of the General People's Committee for Manpower, Training, and Employment, to drastically reduce unemployment. Official figures pin unemployment at 13% out of local population of 5.5 million, almost half of whom are under 20 years old. The strategy to grapple with the challenge is a mixed bag, ranging from maintaining a bloated bureaucracy, providing small loans to private citizens to open private businesses, as well as assorted attempts at job creation. There is also a large focus on ensuring that newly opened foreign businesses remain partially "Libyanized." Foreign companies and embassies operating in Libya must comply with government quotas to employ local workers. The government oftentimes will not issue residency visas to third country nationals looking to work at foreign companies. This poses a challenge to international institutions must draw from a fairly limited pool of English speaking Libyans and would often prefer to hire third country nationals who possess essential skills.

¶11. (C) According to the local IOM representative, the GOL must define exactly what needs exist in the labor market and set up agreements with source countries to recruit people with those skills. Post is aware of only one such pending agreement. According to the Filipino consul, during President Arroyo's visit last month to Libya, the two nations began negotiating long term contracts for Filipino nurses to fill staffing gaps in hospitals and train local staff on proper nursing practices.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING-POTENTIAL FOR COOPERATION WITH INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

12.(C) In an encouraging sign of cooperation with the international community, the GOL recently approached IOM officials in country and asked for assistance on what they see as a growing problem of international human trafficking. According to the IOM representative in country, the GOL wants assistance in dealing with the problem of Nigerian women who are trafficked for sex into Tripoli. While prostitution is not immediately apparent in this conservative country, clearly the government has detected, perhaps through raids in migrant neighborhoods, women who presumably brought here to service the almost all male migratory work force in the city. When Post has asked Libyan officials if there are opportunities for bilateral cooperation on trafficking issues, they have unanimously said that Libya would only work through international organizations.

13.(C) COMMENT. The GOL seems to be making serious efforts to control their border security as best as possible. Like the US, they face the challenge of a long and porous border, coupled with a true need in the economy for cheap migrant labor, especially in the construction industry. They have indicated a willingness to work with the international community on their migrant labor challenges. But, Qadhafi's ideology of pan-African unity will clearly influence how they address this issue. Libya will continue to shy away from projects that bring "outsiders to Libya" or are perceived to infringe on Libyan sovereignty, for example, the proposed joint Libyan-Maltese naval patrols to interdict illegal migrants. There are some promising signs that they are willing to engage on migration issues, but as in most

subjects, it will be on their own, slow and convoluted,
timeline. END COMMENT.
GOLDRICH